



# News Release

Columbia VA Medical Center, Office of Public Affairs, 6439 Garners Ferry Rd, Columbia, SC 29209  
Email: [VHACMSDORNPA@VA.GOV](mailto:VHACMSDORNPA@VA.GOV) Phone: (803) 776-4000 Ext. 6519

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## **Dorn's Community Living residents enjoy buffet-style lunch**

by Carlos Abalo, Wm. Jennings Bryan Dorn public affairs specialist

**COLUMBIA, S.C.** – Celebrating and treating those who served brings the best from many who work at William Jennings Bryan Dorn Veteran Administration Medical Center.

One day every month, on the corner of Veteran Boulevard and Honor Way, the Dorn Community Living Center (CLC) Veterans get a special day in which they get to choose what they want to eat and celebrate the birthdays of their fellow residents. The Nutrition and Food Services at Dorn prepares a buffet-style lunch on the last Thursday of every month to change things up a bit for the permanent residents of the CLC. Provided and attended by numerous employees from Dorn, Veteran residents are given an assortment of healthy choices for food, plus a chance to mingle with fellow Veterans, Dorn employees and Dorn Volunteers.

Dorn staff sees this healthy choice buffet as another way to say 'thank you' to these Veterans for their service.

As conversation, laughter, and music fills the air, volunteers and employees spring into action making sure all get a chance to choose what they want to eat. The CLC leaders, along with various others from Environmental Services, Nutrition and Food Services, Chaplain Services, nurses and an assortment of other frontline employees from all departments come out to honor, eat with and spend an hour or more of quality time with the residents. Others, like chefs from Nutrition and Food are present too; cooking and serving special dishes for the Veterans and getting a chance to meet with them.

The menu today: steak and shrimp or cordon bleu, twice baked potato for a side, vegetable medley and an assortment of desserts made especially for CLC Veterans.

One Veteran resident of CLC, Sylvester B. Byrd, a retired Army command sergeant major, enjoys the buffet each month and loves seeing all the workers and volunteers spending time with him and others. Having served 22 years in the U.S. Army, working for Army General William Westmoreland and serving five tours in

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Vietnam, Byrd is grateful for what he is receiving at CLC. Living 15 years as a resident of CLC, the buffet program is a welcome addition for him and his fellow Veterans.

“I love it,” he said, speaking of the monthly buffets.

But it’s not just the meal Byrd loves, “They are all good people (the Dorn staff). All the girls here are my girlfriends,” he said as he laughs “The people here who do this for us are special people.”

One of the staff members is Patricia Mills. She works as a sitter and escort. Her position allows her to spend time every day with each CLC resident. She assists with their appointments when families are not around, feeds those who need it, keeps them company, reads to them, watches TV with them, helps them with their bathroom visits and encourages them to eat and drink.

“I like to help people and take care of people, you know; help them have a great day and feel good about themselves, just make them feel special,” Mills said. “I feel my main job is to take care of them.”

Erin McCuinen, a food service worker who has been working at Dorn since 2002 at the VA Canteen, said, “I love serving the Vets and they always say ‘thank you’ to me. I say no, ‘I thank you for your service.’”

When Nutrition and Food offered her to become a food service worker, she took the opportunity to be closer to the CLC residents and take care of them. This monthly event became her way to get to know each and every one a little better, and they, in turn, could get to know her better as well.

Two other employees who have a direct impact on the CLC residents are Aubrey Dennis, sous chef in Nutrition and Food, and Theodore Bilbo Jr., supervisor of chefs. Dennis assists in the preparations of these special meals and along with the rest of the cooking staff. He helps come up with foods that are out of the ordinary, yet are healthy and nutritious.

“I usually don’t get out of the kitchen much, but during the monthly buffet and birthday celebrations, I get to give back personally and am afforded one-on-one time with each resident from the CLC,” Bilbo said. “I find it very rewarding and am grateful to each and every one of them for their sacrifice and service to our nation.”

The amazing efforts Nutrition and Foods and others put into assuring the Veterans at CLC get to have something different every month is above and beyond.

Making sure all the CLC residents eat and eat the right foods according to their diet are Zelda Council, Registered Dietician and Food Operations manager for Nutrition and Food Services, and Kathryn Wetzel, Registered Dietician and CLC dietitian, Nutrition and Food Services. Council and Wetzel reassure CLC residents do not select foods that are restricted based on their individual special diet orders, ensuring each get the right portion of food and have a well-balanced meal. Additionally, Wetzel and Council educate the Veterans on choosing healthy selections and how to balance choices.

“I’m happy to bring food to their home (CLC) and to be with them.” Zelda said.

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“It’s great to see all the services coming together to serve and be with the Veterans in their setting, it’s a good thing.” Council says.

Bob Harding, a retired Army master sergeant, has been a CLC resident for the last three years. He is also one of the event’s chief organizers. He loves the monthly buffet, as a non-commissioned officer in his past; he looks at this event as following the NCO creed by ensuring all his troops are taken care of, as he himself is cared for by the Dorn workers.

“It’s a good moral factor,” Harding said. “It’s good (to have) something different every month and I feel it’s decent, and I love how everyone comes together, both employees and us.”

The program is run by Kimberlee Anderson, Registered Dietician and acting chief of Nutrition and Food Services. Anderson, along with her staff, assures CLC residents get treated with special attention.

Anderson developed and pulled together a team to create events focusing on wholesome foods and social interactivity among the residents and employees of Dorn. The multi-disciplinary team coordinates the buffet as well as monthly birthday celebrations. During the buffets, she queries the Veterans about the food and how they like it. Anderson talks about the menu and the special attention that goes into the preparation of all the dishes. Adding, how the desserts are specially made so even diabetics can have something sweet to eat.

“I love coming to the CLC events and interacting with the residents,” Anderson said. “Events like this remind our staff how much of an impact we have on the quality of life of the residents at the CLC. I know the event was a success when the Veterans, employees and leaders are all wearing smiles on their faces.”

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**EDITOR’S NOTE:** A web-version of the story along with high-resolution photos are available at: <http://www.columbiasc.va.gov/pressreleases/summary.asp>